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IV.—A NOTE ON MARSTON'S MALCONTENT.

Every commentator learns—not infrequently at his own expense—that one of the most subtle of the many foes by which his path is beset is the traditional but mistaken interpretation. When one of these interpretations has once been introduced by a trustworthy authority it can evade the most experienced of editors; it can impose itself upon the ripest of scholars, sometimes for generations. An interesting illustration is furnished by a passage in Marston's old comedy of the *Malcontent*.

The first edition of this play, "by Iohn Marston. Printed by V. S. for William Aspley," appeared in London in 1604. A second edition, "augmented by Marston. With the Additions played by the *King's Maiesties Servants*. Written by Ihon Webster. Printed by V. S. for William Aspley" was published in the same year. Dyce used both editions for his text of the *Malcontent* in Webster's Works (London, Pickering, 1830; 2nd edit., Routledge, 1857) and gives the textual variants in his notes. No variants for the passage in question are noted. The text of the second edition was reprinted by Halliwell for his edition of Marston in the "Library of Old Authors" (London, John Russell Smith, 1856).

One of the most important characters in the play is the cynic Malevole, the discussion of whose relationship to the melancholy Jaques has recently been revived.¹

At the opening of Act II, Scene 2, Malevole enters at one door, Bianca, Emilia and Maquerelle at the other door. With the exception of one obvious correction of punctuation I give the text of the second edition of 1604 :

"*Malevole*" [addressing Bianca and Emilia] "Blesse yee cast a ladies!" [then addressing Maquerelle] "Ha, Dipsas, how doost thou, olde Cole?"

Maq. Olde Cole?

Mal. I, olde Cole! Mee thinkes thou liest like a brand under billets of greene wood. Hee that will inflame a yong

¹ See E. E. Stoll, *Shakspere, Marston, and the Malcontent Type*, *Modern Philology*, Vol. III, p. 281, f.

wenches hart let him lay close to her an old cole that hath first bin fired, a pandresse, my half-burnt lint, who though thou canst not flame thy selfe, yet arte able to set a thousand virgins tapers afire," etc.

The portion of this quotation with which we are especially concerned is Malevole's first speech. In the fourth edition of Dodsley's *Old Plays* (London, 1825, Vol. IV, p. 39) it reappears as,

"Bless ye chaste ladies! ha, Dipsas! how dost thou old Cole"?

It will be observed that the good old word "cast", although quite natural and proper in this passage, was emended to "chaste" by Dodsley. On the other hand, "Cole" of the quartos, which, by this time, was in need of some attention, was left undisturbed. It is not often that two of the worst faults of a textual critic jostle elbows in a sentence of only eleven words. But it would be a waste of time and space to specify the shortcomings of the dramatic editors of the eighteenth century. The few who slipped by the acrimonious Gifford did not escape the relentless vigilance of Dyce.

The text of Sir Walter Scott in his *Ancient British Drama*, Vol. II, p. 15, is a mere reprint of Dodsley.

Dyce, whose knowledge of our old drama was enormous, returned to "cast," as might have been expected, and, in his first edition of Webster (1830, Vol. IV, p. 52), gives us,

"Bless ye, cast o' ladies!—Ha, Dipsas! how dost thou old Cole"?

The second edition appeared in 1857. Meanwhile Dyce had waked up to the fact that "Cole" was nothing but the sixteenth century spelling of "coal." Hence we have (p. 338),

"Bless ye, cast o' ladies!—Ha, dipsas! how dost thou old coal"?

This is the text adopted by Mr. Bullen in his edition of Marston, London, 1887, Vol. I, p. 238.

Marston is not represented in the *Mermaid Series*.

One might believe, indeed, in view of its undeserved misfortunes, one might hope, that this poor little scrap of text was finally clear and correct. It is the primary object of this note, however, to show that one point still remains to be considered. This is the obviously classical allusion in the word "dipsas." What is "dipsas," and why does Malevole apply it to Maquerelle?

Editorial comment begins with a note signed S. in the Dodsley collection, l. c. Presumably, S. stands for George Steevens, the

well-known editor of Shakespeare (so Hazlitt in the 5th edit. of Dodsley, Vol. I, p. xiii).

"The Dipsas," says Steevens, "is the *Fire-Drake*, a serpent of a nature directly opposite to that of the *Hydrus*. The one is supposed to kill by inflammation, the other by cold."

To the present day this note continues to dominate the interpretation of dipsas, not only here, but also in another passage to which I shall refer later. The non-classical reader is likely to be bewildered rather than instructed by it. The classical reader will probably be able to detect the fact that Steevens took "dipsas" to be the well-known classical serpent by that name. To such a reader the note is unnecessary. No doubt Steevens had a source for his remarkable information, but the discovery of it would be of no value in the present inquiry. It may be said, however, that if the dipsas is the fire-drake the Oxford Dictionary needs to revise its account of both words. Further, not even the indefatigable Aldobrandis (*Serpentum et Draconum Libri Duo*, Bologna, 1640, p. 275, f.), seems to have heard of this distinction between death by the hydrus and death by the dipsas, and, in any case, the statement of it has no bearing upon our passage. The wording of the note appears to suggest that Steevens took Malevole's second speech to be an explanation of the allusion in dipsas. But one has only to read the speech to become convinced that the object of it is to explain, not dipsas, but "old Cole."

Steevens' note is copied by Sir Walter Scott without comment.

Dyce says of dipsas:

"A kind of serpent; those whom it bit were said to die tormented with thirst; hence Lucan, '*torrida dipsas*'."

The comment is repeated in the second edition. This is certainly a vast improvement on Steevens. To be sure, Dyce did not inform us where his citation from Lucan [9, 718] was to be found. But the value of exact reference was not yet fully appreciated.

Halliwell says nothing of dipsas in the commentary to his edition, although he not infrequently pauses to discourse upon other matters of much less importance.

Lastly comes Mr. Bullen, to whose untiring industry and enthusiasm every lover of the drama is so deeply indebted. He writes of dipsas as follows:

"A very venomous little serpent. 'A man or beast wounded with this serpent', says Topsel in his *Hist. of Serpents* (ed. 1658,

p. 699), 'is afflicted with intolerable thirst, insomuch as it is easier for him to break his belly than to quench his thirst with drinking : always gaping like a bull, casteth himself down into the water and maketh no spare of the cold liquor, but continually sucketh it in till either the belly break or the poison drive out the life by overcoming the vital spirits '."

This quotation is interesting but, after all, is not Dyce's note more to the point? For example, why cite Topsel for a classical allusion, and that, too, in such a way as to give a non-classical reader no inkling of the fact that it really is a classical allusion? Marston himself was quite able to get his classical learning at first hand. Moreover, Topsel's History of Serpents did not appear until 1608, four years after the Malcontent was published and at least eight years after it was written.

Even granting, therefore, that the interpretation given to "dipsas" by Mr. Bullen, after Dyce and Steevens, is correct, would it not have been better, merely as a matter of method, to consult, first of all, the classical authorities? The process, in this case, is unusually brief and simple. The allusion, whatever it is, is confined to a single word, and the word is as clearly of Greek origin as any word could well be. If, therefore, we turn, first of all, to any standard Greek lexicon ten minutes with the references under *διψάς* will be more than enough to show that what the worthy Topsel has said is hardly more than a paraphrase, though doubtless not at first hand, of Nikander's *Theriaka*, 338-342:

δάγματι δ' ἐμφλέγεται κραδίη πρόπαν, ἀμφὶ δὲ καύσῳ
χείλε' ὑπ' ἀζαλέης αὐαίνεται ἄβροχα δίψης·
αὐτὰρ ὄγ', ἥντε ταῦρος ὑπὲρ ποταμοῖο νενευκώς,
χανδὸν ἀμέτρητον δέχεται ποτόν, εἰσόκε νηδὺς
ὀμφαλὸν ἐκρηξείε, χέοι. δ' ὑπεραχθέα φόρτον.

This famous poem of the Alexandrian Age is the fountain head of a large proportion of what we hear on the subject of serpents in later Antiquity and during the Middle Ages, and few serpents are mentioned more frequently than the dipsas.¹

¹ Irrespective of Lucan, 9, 610; 718; 738, f.; Silius Italicus, 3, 313; Martial, 3, 44, 7; Aelian, *H. A.* 6, 51; Lucian, *De Dipsadibus*, 4, f., and of numerous passages found in such authors as Solinus, Isidorus, Galen, Dioscurides, etc., etc., the Scholiast on Nikander, *Ther.* 343 says that the famous story of the ass and the dipsas, which Nikander himself relates, was also found in the *Κωφοὶ Σάτυροι*, a lost Satyr-drama of Sophokles (339, *N.*) Aelian repeats the

But let us pause a moment to consider an important but, up to this point, a much neglected aspect of this discussion. It will be observed, from what has been said, that we all agree as to what "dipsas" is in this passage of Marston. But when we ask why it is found in this passage of Marston the silence on all sides appears to be unanimous. Presumably, we have all supposed that dipsas was in some way an anticipation of the idea elaborated in "old coal," etc. If this is true Malevole's discussion would have been more effective without the word than with it. Moreover, even after all due allowance has been made for Marston's characteristic oddity, it must be confessed that the explanation is really too far-fetched to be convincing.

Fortunately, however, it can be shown beyond a doubt that we have all been mistaken from the first. If we are not ourselves fortunate enough to remember the passage which is the key to the situation, a few moments, this time, with any standard lexicon of the Latin language, will lead us straight to the proof that Malevole was not thinking of dipsas, a kind of snake, but of Dipsas, a kind of woman.

Her name occurs but once in classical literature, but it occurs in a work so well-known in Marston's time that practically every motif it contains reappears somewhere in the Elizabethan Drama. I refer to the *Amores* of Ovid.

The *lena* or maquerelle is a regular character in the erotic poetry of antiquity, more especially in the comedy, the epigram and the elegy. The eighth elegy of Ovid's first book is concerned with one of these women. It opens as follows:

Est quaedam (quicumque volet cognoscere lenam
Audiant!), est quaedam nomine Dipsas anus.

These two lines are all that Malevole was thinking of. His "Ha, Dipsas" is nothing but a translation into Ovidian allusion of the French allusion already contained in Maquerelle, a word odiously familiar in the Parisian literature of Marston's time. Obviously,

story in his account of the dipsas and adds Ibykos (25 *B.*) and two plays, otherwise unknown, one by Dinolchos, the rival of Epicharmos (*Com. Dorica*, 8, p. 150, Kaibel), the other by Apollophanes (9, Kock). The long line of mediaeval authorities is cited and discussed by Marston's elder contemporary, Ulisse Aldobrandi, to whose voluminous work on the subject of serpents I have already alluded. It is also interesting to find that, according to the Oxford Dictionary, the dipsas crept into English literature as early as Wyclif and that, as late as 1894, it was still able to pose as an ornament of verse.

therefore, the "dipsas" of Dyce and Bullen should be corrected to Dipsas.

Ovid's own reason for calling his *Iena* Dipsas has nothing to do with the passage of Marston, but will serve to clear up the question finally for us. In verses 3-4, he says:

Ex re nomen habet: nigri non illa parentem
Memnonis in roseis sobria vidit equis.

In other words, Ovid's Dipsas is like Juvenal's Phiale ("the Flowing Bowl"), or the woman Canthara ("the Tank") who through Hagen's obvious emendation is connected in some way with the Vergilian tradition. She has been given a nickname characterizing the perennial thirst of these Sarah Gamps of Antiquity. References to the weakness are constantly recurring.

We now see why the woman and the serpent have the same name. Ex re nomen habet, says Ovid, describing the woman: *κατηγορεῖ τῆς διψάδος τὸ ἔργον αὐτὸ ἡμῖν τὸ ὄνομα*, says Aelian, describing the serpent. Both deserve their common name of Dipsas, and each derives it regularly from *διψάω*, the serpent, because it created an undying thirst, the woman because she possessed one.

Although my discussion has been primarily concerned with the passage of Marston, it may not be amiss to add that this was not the first time the name of Dipsas had occurred in Elizabethan literature. For example, in the *dramatis personae* of Lyly's *Endimion*, a play which, according to Mr. Bond, was first acted on the 2nd of February, 1586, we find "Dipsas an old Enchantress".

Here, too, Steevens' "fire-drake" has proved to be a will o' the wisp for succeeding commentators.

There have been four editions of the *Endimion* in modern times: the first, by Dilke in his *Old English Plays*, London, 1814, Vol. II; the second, by Fairholt in his edition of the plays, London, 1858, Vol. I; the third, a separate edition by G. P. Baker, N. Y., 1894; the fourth, by R. Warwick Bond, in his fine edition of Lyly's collected works, Oxford, 1902, Vol. III.

Dilke says (l. c. p. 19):

"Dipsas, as Mr. Steevens informs us in a note to the 'Malcontent', is the *fire-drake*, a serpent of a directly opposite nature to the *hydrus*: the one is supposed to kill by inflammation, the other by cold."

I find no comment on the name in the editions of Fairholt and Mr. Baker, but Mr. Bond (l. c. Vol. III, p. 506) reprints Dilke's note, and adds:

"It [i. e. the dipsas] is found in Aelian VI, 51."

Now, it is well-known that in Antiquity the *lena* was always looked upon as a witch. Her business included, as a matter of course, the brewing of love-potions and the practice of necromancy in all its branches. Ovid himself gives a long list of the feats in magic which his dreadful old woman was supposed to perform. It is evident, therefore, that when Lyly selected a name for his "Old Enchantress", he was not thinking of Steevens' "fire-drake", but of the quaedam nomine Dipsas anus of the poet Ovid.

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